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ABSTRACT

During the first half of the twentieth century, there was slow but steady progress toward larger units of public library service, such as county and regional systems. But there was a lag both in the conceptual and the actual development of the central libraries of these systems as strong points for direct service to readers. Librarians were first committed to reach out at the local level and to extend at least minimal service to everyone. The principle of local, direct access to libraries partially prevented attention from being paid to the quality service and subject depth of resources that a centralized system could provide. With the passage of the Library Services Act (LSA) in 1956 and the approval of new standards for public libraries, the ground work was laid to correct this unbalanced development. Most of the earlier efforts to form larger units of service, including those under LSA, were directed toward making books physically convenient for people. Only in the last few years, due to the impetus of some forward-looking state planning and the passage of the Library Services and Construction Act in 1964, has effort been focused on building strong central services and resources. (Author/SL)

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AN OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF LARGER UNITS OF SERVICE AND THE CENTRAL LIBRARY CONCEPT

By

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AN OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF LARGER UNITS OF SERVICE AND THE CENTRAL LIBRARY CONCEPT

The evolution and development of the American public library has been studied and described from various aspects by several writers. It is not the purpose here then to retell this story but rather to attempt to delineate both the direction and the change in philosophy which were instrumental in its evolution, and which culminated in the concept of the central library serving a larger unit of service.

First, the philosophy. It would be a mistake to assume that Americans in the latter half of the nineteenth century were thirsting for library service. Lionel R. McColvin has written:

> There was no demand for public libraries. The public did not ask for [them]. Why should they do so?--they had no idea of what a public library could do or mean. They did not know that they needed or would use it. They did not, on the whole, even know that books had anything worthwhile to give them. It was only when there were public libraries that most people had any realization that they had anything to give. In other words, here is, definitely, a case when supply created demand, not when demand created supply.[1]

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[1]Lionel R. McColvin, The Chance to Read (London: Phoenix, 1956), p. 23.

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Even as late as the 1950's, Ralph Munn echoed similar sentiments at a conference on the implications of the Public Library Inquiry with this sobering statement: "The library does not and cannot have universal appeal. The peoples do not thirst for knowledge. The world is not waiting for a book."[2]

Then why a public library at all? Shera discusses several basic themes underlying the growth and development of the library. Among these, three stand out as having special significance for this discussion. The first of these consists in the belief on the part of many in the perfectibility of man, a belief which in Shera's words was "the very lifeblood of the incipient public library."[3] If every man possessed within himself the potential for moral and intellectual development, and if such development is a sine qua non of judicious self-government, then any agency directed towards realizing this potential must become the recipient of public support.[4]

A second significant factor in the growth of the public library movement was the conviction that universal literacy is essential to an enlightened people. The stimulus of this belief was channeled in several directions--

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[2]Ralph Munn, "Summary of the Conference," in A Forum on the Public Library Inquiry, edited by Lester Asheim (New York: Columbia University, 1950), p. 270.

[3]Jesse Shera, Foundations of the Public Library (Hamden, Conn.: Shoestring Press [1949], 1965), p. 218.

[4]Ibid.

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the lyceum, adult education movement, and the public school were founded to some degree on this principle, as was the public library. It was this common base coupled with a common mission--with only the means being different--which won for the library the support of many in the education movement.[5]

Finally, a third factor consists in a view of the library as an instrument of moral uplift, or at least a preventative of corruption.[6] On this point, Ditzion cites the 1865 Annual Report of the Lowell, Massachusetts, City Library, as follows:

> Let the library be free to all, and then, perhaps, there will be one young man less in the place where intoxicating drinks are found. . . . Make the library free to all and then, perhaps, there will be one young woman less to fall from the path of purity and goodness. . . .[7]

For some, then, the library was a guardian of morals, a preventor of crime, a civilizing leaven. Even the American Library Association capitalized on, if not approved of, this image when, at the conference of 1891, one of the organization's subcommittees concluded that no lover of humanity could deny the special fitness of librarians to enlighten, purify, and elevate mankind.[8]

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[5]Sidney Ditzion, Arsenals of a Democratic Culture (Chicago: American Library Association, 1947), pp. 77-96.

[6]Ibid., pp. 102-107, 178.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Library Journal, XVI (1891), 77, 341.

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Kathleen Molz, in an article appearing in The American Scholar,[9] has translated the several basic factors influencing public library development into two axioms: "reading is good" and "everyone should read." Moreover, it is on the basis of these axioms that the public library exacted its support from the community. The first of these combines to an extent the educational-moral currents running through the library movement. The second, being derived from the American egalitarian ideal, gave a sense of mission to the library. If reading is good, then this goodness should be diffused to all people. Consequently, library service was quite early being extended through branch libraries in cities (1871), and later through book carts and bookmobiles in rural areas. Charles Jewett in 1853 enunciated the library's mission when he said, "We meet to provide for the diffusion of knowledge of good books, and for enlarging the means of public access to them."

Even if the statements of McColvin and Munn were true--that there was no demand for public libraries and that the world is not waiting for a book--the issue of truth or falsity is beside the point and of little relevance here. What is important is the fact that a large body of influential people--educators, patricians,

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[9]Kathleen Molz, "The Public Library: A People's University," American Scholar, XXXIV (Winter, 1964-65), 95-102.

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philanthropists--believed that the public library was a social necessity, that it did have a relevant role to play, that it could make a unique contribution. In fine, this was the philosophy or rationale underlying public library development, and more specifically, the direction of that development.

In regard to the direction of public library development, it would be a mistake to assume that the public library became a national priority, based on grass-roots support. Quite the contrary might prove to be the more accurate assumption. There was an indigenous need, of course, for education in both the narrow and broad meanings of the word, but this need did not prompt the public to demand libraries, or stimulate local governments to establish them. Rather, it was the recognition of this need by the educated, the philanthropists, and the political decision-makers which stimulated the establishment of an institution which seemed able to respond to these needs. In a very real sense, therefore, this institution, like most other service agencies and institutions, was "superimposed" on society as one response to its many needs.

Nor was library development a widespread, grass-roots phenomenon. The public library seems to be a product of an urbanized society. Shera speaks to this point: "But it is known that libraries are distinctly an urban phenomenon, that they flourish only when the economic ability of the region is sufficiently great to permit adequate support,

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and that they are the product of a mature culture."[10] And again: "Observed from every point of view, the Boston Public Library emerges as the product of its social environment."[11]

Thus, the direction of public library development, like the development of so many other social services, almost naturally focused on urban environments. It was the city which provided the social and economic climate in which the library could grow.

The public library emerged, therefore, as a product of an urbanized society, and for a long period it was more or less limited to that environment. However, the philosophy on which the library was founded recognized no such limitations. Put very simply, "everyone should read" because "reading is good."[12]

The implications of this philosophy were first realized in the cities themselves. Of primary concern was the provision of adequate service throughout the cities, which were expanding not only in population but also in area. As a result of such expansion, the Boston Public Library established its first branch library in 1871.[13] In 1876, at the first convention of the American Library

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[10]Shera, op. cit., p. 15.

[11]Ibid., p. 172.

[12]Molz, op. cit.,

[13]Horace G. Waldin, The Public Library of the City of Boston: A History (Boston: Trustees of the Library, 1911), pp. 108-109.

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Association, Justin Windsor reported:

> The Boston Public Library now consists of a central library . . . [and] six branch libraries . . . situated at from two to seven miles from the central library, forming a cordon of posts. Farther outlying we have begun a system of deliveries or agencies, where orders for books are received, which are sent to the nearest branch or to the central library. The books are sent in response, and delivered at the delivery.[14]

It was not the purpose of branch libraries to duplicate or even approximate the range and depth of resources which characterize the central library. This was not the virtue of the branch; rather, access, extension, and stimulation of service at the local level were its attributes. At least in theory, moreover, the resources of the central library could be channeled to the reader through his branch outlet.

The development of branch libraries is important to the present discussion not for what was accomplished but for the concepts which this phenomenon represents, namely, extension of service to the reader where he is, and secondly, the organization of a library system based on a strong central unit with convenient local outlets.

Branch libraries were the established means for serving an expanding city, but what of the non-urban area? The democratic principles on which the public library movement rested would not long permit library service to remain

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[14]"The Proceedings" (of the Conference of Librarians), American Library Journal, I (November 30, 1876), 125-126. For a brief history of branch library development, see Milton Bryan, "A History of Branch Libraries," in "Current Trends in Branch Libraries," edited by Andrew Geddes, Library Trends, XIV, No. 4 (April, 1966), 368-373.

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an urban privilege--as was the case with so many other services. It seems that there was a contradiction between what appeared to be an urban monopoly on library service and the commitment of librarians to make good reading available to everyone, farmer as well as factory worker. But how to bridge this gap? Certainly city governments could not be expected to provide free service beyond their corporate limits. Since this was not the responsibility of the cities, attention focused on the state governments, and towards the turn of the century, state government once again began to take an active interest in libraries.[15]

Changing Patterns

Thus far the city has been the key unit in providing library service. That such service was confined more or less to urban areas was to be expected, for according to Joeckel,

> Where the population is largely concentrated in densely populated cities and towns, there the establishment of public libraries was natural and almost inevitable.
> In the more sparsely populated rural areas, on the

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[15]It should be noted that quite early in the century, in fact prior to the founding of the Boston Public Library, some state governments were actively involved in providing library service. One such abortive attempt was the school district library movement in New York State in 1838.

Also, in 1816, Indiana attempted to establish county libraries when it was still a frontier state. Conditions proved to be too unfavorable, however. Cf. Asa Wynkoop, Commissions State Aid and State Agencies (rev. ed.; Chicago: American Library Association, 1923), pp. 5-6; and Oliver Garceau, The Public Library in the Political Process (New York: Columbia University, 1949), pp. 25-26.

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other hand, the organization of public libraries has been correspondingly more difficult.[16]

Traditionally state government has been oriented towards rural areas. The composition of state legislatures in the past has to a large extent engendered this rural concern. As one result of this rural bent, the question arose as to the state's responsibility to stimulate, if not sponsor, public library development in rural areas.

During the period of urban library development many states did not remain neutral toward libraries. While it cannot be said that they took a very active role in this regard, some did make a contribution by passing legislation which permitted the establishment of tax-supported libraries. It still remained for local authorities to implement this legislation, however, by taxing the public for such support.

The decade immediately preceding the turn of the century seemed to be a period of renewed emphasis on the part of several states concerning public library development. During this decade these states set up library commissions to encourage local governments in establishing public libraries. Often these commissions could provide books or funds for books to any locality which met the state's requirements.[17] New York State as an added feature

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[16]Carleton B. Joeckel, "Library Extension Today," in Library Extension: Problems and Solutions, edited by Carleton B. Joeckel (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1946), p. 12.

[17]Garceau, op. cit., p. 39.

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began sending in 1892 small collections of books called "traveling libraries" throughout the state, a service soon imitated by other states.[18] Growth was so rapid during this decade that, according to Garceau, "by 1900 state governments were playing a real part in library development."[19]

It is not the purpose here to attempt to describe every factor underlying the state library movement. Specific conditions and causes vary from state to state. Suffice it to say, however, that the ideals and principles underlying public library development in cities--and the subsequent success of urban libraries--were instrumental in prompting state participation. If it is true that an enlightened citizenry is essential for democracy, and if the public library is an appropriate instrument of such enlightenment, then it seems logical that the states also felt a responsibility for providing such educational opportunities to those not living in urban areas.

Given this realization, the main thrust of state library effort was directed first towards stimulating and persuading smaller governmental units to organize and support public libraries, and secondly towards stimulating existing libraries by means of rotating collections and

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[18]Eleanor H. Morgan, "The County Library," in Library Extension: Problems and Solutions, edited by Carleton B. Joeckel (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1946), p. 59.

[19]Garceau, op. cit., p. 39.

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hortatory campagins.[20]

According to Robert Leigh,

> The primary purpose of this [state library] movement . . . was to add more independent, local libraries where they did not exist, especially in rural areas where there were unserved populations that on a map extended over half of the country's land area.[21]

It soon became apparent, however, that traveling libraries or boxes of books and small local units which were both isolated and independent could not even begin to approximate the level of library service provided in urban centers. Up to the turn of the century, public libraries of any scope existed mainly in urban areas. Outside the large cities, there were only small and relatively weak library units spotted at intervals with unserved areas in between. The state library movement--preceding by a decade the advent of county libraries--did not have as its objective the provision of adequate service to these unserved areas. Rather, state libraries hoped to stimulate local

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[20]Arnold Miles and Lowell A. Martin, Public Administration and the Library (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1941), p. 22. Miles and Martin, writing in 1941, further comment on the later effects of the state library movement as follows: "It is a paradox that the very success of these methods has created one of the pressing public library problems of the day, although one that is too often overshadowed by exclusive concern with extension to unserved areas. This is the problem of small units providing service in name only and so organized that adequate service appears to be beyond reach" (p. 22).

[21]Robert D. Leigh, "Changing Concepts of the Public Library's Role," in New Directions in Public Library Development, edited by Lester Asheim (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957), p. 3.

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library development by means of missionary campaigns and traveling libraries. But it did not take much foresight to see that many areas were so sparsely populated and economically weak that local libraries, even if established, would not remain viable agencies for very long.

Beyond the strictly local level, the apparently inevitable step was an advance to the next larger unit in the hierarchy of government.[22] The county seemed to be the logical choice as the next step in the attempt to solve the problem of how to equalize opportunities for library service. Unfortunately, however, for many librarians the county was viewed not as the next step but as the final solution.

Although the county library movement gained most of its initial momentum at the turn of the century, the idea had a long history. Thomas Jefferson seemed to have hit upon the idea of county library service as early as 1809.[23] Moreover, the first legislation for county libraries to which reference can be found occurred in Indiana in 1816.[24]

Another factor which might have been a contribution to county library development centered on the significance

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[22]Carleton B. Joeckel, The Government of the American Public Library (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1935), p. 264.

[23]Roy J. Honeywell, The Educational Work of Thomas Jefferson (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1931), p. 24.

[24]Julia E. Johnson, County Libraries (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1930), p. 55.

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of the county in the southern states. Local loyalties, habits, and institutions in the South clustered around the county. Consequently in these states the library movement could tap the same sources of local pride and enthusiasm found in the villages and towns of the North.[25]

Even though the concept of library service based on the county unit had a long history, it was not until 1898 that a major benchmark was reached. In that year two libraries in Ohio began county-wide library extension under laws framed especially for this purpose. These libraries were the Cincinnati Public Library in Hamilton County and the Brumback Library in Van Wert County.[26]

A short time later, in 1901, the Washington Free Public Library of Hagerstown, Maryland, began serving most of the county in which it was located. Clearly the aim of these early efforts which were soon to be copied by counties in other states was library coverage, that is, the horizontal extension of library service--thin or nominal though it often was--over a larger area. This objective was reflected in the first report (1901-1902) of the Washington County librarian, Miss Mary Titcomb:

> Before we rest content, every home in the county must be the recipient of [the county library's] benefits.

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[25]For a detailed treatment of county library development in the South, see Louis R. Wilson and Edward A. Wight, County Library Service in the South (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1935).

[26]Harriet C. Long, County Library Service (Chicago: American Library Association, 1925), pp. 18-20.

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> To this end we need more branches, home libraries for clusters of homes remote from any rural center, closer relations with the schools, and more particular work with children.[27]

In the ten years following the Ohio success, Wisconsin, Oregon, and Minnesota provided for county library service in one form or another, but development was irregular and slow until California began a vigorous campaign to organize such libraries on a state-wide basis around 1909.[28] Under the leadership of James L. Gillis, county libraries proved to be viable units for extending service over broad geographic areas.

Despite the fact, however, that California is hardly typical of the other states, that counties in the United States exhibit extreme ranges in both population and size,[29] and consequently in ability to support library service, the county library for the first third of the twentieth century has borne the brunt of the campaign for the extension of library service. By 1935 only the New England states and Delaware, Idaho, and North Dakota did not have state-wide laws for organizing county

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[27]Cited in ibid., p. 21.

[28]"J. L. G. Speaks for Himself," News Notes of the California Libraries, LII (October, 1957), 649. This entire issue is dedicated as a memorial to James L. Gillis.

[29]According to Joeckel--writing in 1936--counties varied from 4,000,000 to 200 population or less; from 20,000 to 25 square miles (Carleton B. Joeckel, "Realities of Regionalism," in Library Trends, edited by Louis R. Wilson (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1937), p. 80.)

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libraries.[30]

Thus far the discussion has focused on the county as a unit of library service, but has not described the role of the headquarters library in the county. Harriet C. Long, in her manual for county librarians, includes a brief discussion on the function of this central unit:

> The rooms selected should have all the requirements of light, head, and adaptability to shelving purposes required by any library, but in addition special attention must be paid to the ease with which shipping can be handled, for it must always be borne in mind that the outgoing and incoming shipments are among the most important features of the work done at headquarters. . . . If the county seat already has a public library and is not at once ready to join the county library system, the headquarters will not require a reading room and loan desk facilities for the city people. Circulation at headquarters will in this case be confined to out-of-town patrons . . . and will not be overwhelmingly large.[31]

The significance of this statement in terms of county library function seems to lie in what is not said, rather than in what is actually stated. No mention is made of centralized reference service, of collections of range as well as depth, of periodical holdings. Rather, the county library is depicted more or less as a warehouse for local libraries--a back-stop for circulation service--with direct service to readers seemingly the exception, and added as an afterthought. Basically, it was a device for decentralizing service, while centralizing administrative functions and technical processing. Accessibility and convenience

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[30]Morgan, op. cit., p. 59.

[31]Long, op. cit., pp. 80-81.

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through decentralization and fragmentation became the hallmarks of the county library movement.[32]

Because such efforts were bound to produce some measure of success, and because of the missionary enterprise of some of the protagonists in the movement--among other factors--librarians for some time afterward continued to emphasize "store at your door" service even during that period when so many other services and facilities were being centralized.

According to Garceau, there were many counties where virtually every family visited the central city about once a week for shopping and services. That commercial firms appreciated this fact is evidenced by the growth of shopping centers on the one hand, and the demise of the village or crossroads store on the other. "At the very time this was happening in commercial distribution and service, the librarians were struggling to establish retail outlets across the countryside, either through bookmobiles, deposit stations, or small branches."[33] He goes on to add that such retail service at the door could probably be justified for very few services beyond the mail and public utilities at that time.[34]

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[32]Lowell A. Martin, "County and Regional Libraries: Hope and Reality," Minnesota Libraries, XIX (June, 1959), 148.

[33]Garceau, op. cit., p. 209.

[34]Ibid.

Despite the obvious shortcomings and blatant weaknesses, the county library movement did gain support from the library profession during at least the first third of the century. Generally speaking, it appeared that the profession was banking on the theory that a larger unit of service would lead to a higher level of financial support as well as improved service. Later developments have basically supported this view, if two essential conditions are present. First, the larger unit must be based upon genuine strength, that is, a central library which is not only able to support services offered by local libraries, but in addition offers a higher level of service directly to readers in the system. Second, the larger unit must have the economic ability to support library service. Too often, however, neither condition was present. City and town libraries frequently chose not to participate in these new enterprises for fear that their own resources would become overburdened. As a result the county frequently took what was left--that portion of the county which was without library service or with minimal service at best. Thus the county library started without the two necessary preconditions: it did not build on existing strength, nor did it coordinate libraries into a single unit.[35] Rather, it too often became another ineffective library, characterized by grandiose aims coupled with limited resources.

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[35]Martin, op. cit., pp. 151-152.

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Continuing Evolution--the Regional Library

With the exception of California's and the county libraries of a few metropolitan county systems, the county library was eventually acknowledged to be less than ideal with respect to providing service over larger areas. Several drawbacks have already been noted, while still others appeared to be indigenous to the nature of county government. One of the more striking weaknesses resided in the wide variance in county populations and land areas from state to state, and more particularly the small size of precisely those rural counties where service was completely lacking.[36]

Due to a whole spectrum of factors, only a few of which have been cited here, the county library came to be viewed in a more realistic perspective, that is, as only one approach to providing library service over broad areas. No longer was the individual county viewed as the final solution to library organization.

This new and more critical thinking on the part of the library profession did not culminate in the complete repudiation of the county library concept, however. Much was learned from the county library experience, in addition to the fact that there were some notable success stories within this movement. For example, in the West, Kern, Fresno, and other county libraries in California, and in

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[36]Garceau, op. cit., p. 208.

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the East, Hamilton and Cuyahoga Counties--to name a few--served as both "a sample and a symbol of a regional library system in the wide-open spaces giving modern public library service hitherto considered possible only in sizeable cities."[37] According to Leigh, it was the success of these few units which prepared the way for a different concept of public library organization to emerge in the United States.[38]

As early as 1926, the American Library Association recognized the shortcomings inherent in the county unit, and called for experimentation with units larger than the county.[39] In that same year, there occurred one of the first variations from the single county pattern--the multi-county service unit. In 1926 a contractual agreement was established between Sierra and Plumas Counties, followed a few months later by a similar agreement between Mariposa and Merced Counties--all in California.[40] In each case, a rural county contracted for service with a more populous neighbor.[41]

For the most part, however, the multi-county library represented only a superficial modification in the old structure. Because a larger size and a broader

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[37]Leigh, op. cit., p. 4.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Julia Wright Merrill, Regional and District Libraries (Chicago: American Library Association, 1942), p. 1.

[40]Ibid., p. 7. [41]Ibid.

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tax base appeared to be the answers to the small county's problems. It was naively assumed that the formation of larger units based on two or more counties was the answer. Frequently the end result of this process was a larger, weaker unit.[42]

In addition to the multi-county pattern, libraries were soon being organized in regional formations as well. In 1930, through the aid of the Carnegie Corporation and the leadership of librarian Helen Stewart, the Fraser Valley Union Library was organized to demonstrate regional library service in Canada. This was to become the first tax-supported regional library in Canada a few years later in 1934.[43] Two years later (1936), two additional regional libraries were established according to the pattern of Fraser Valley. These were the Okanagan and Vancouver regions, likewise initiated by means of Carnegie monies. While these three regions constitute more or less natural areas, they have been classified by Merrill as the special district type of regional organization, principally because each encompasses a certain number of taxing units.[44]

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[42]Lowell A. Martin, "L. S. A. and Library Standards: Two Sides of the Coin," in The Impact of the Library Services Act: Progress and Potential, edited by Donald E. Strout (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1962), p. 10.

[43]Violet L. Coughlin, Larger Units of Public Library Service in Canada (Metuchen, N. J.: Scarecrow, 1968), pp. 66-67.

[44]Merrill, op. cit., p. 6.

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Not far behind these developments in Western Canada was the organization of another type of regional service in Eastern Canada. Once again, due to the munificence of the Carnegie Corporation, a regional library demonstration was established on Prince Edward Island in 1933.[45] The organization of library service in this instance was somewhat different from the special district unit. Because of the small geographic area of the Island, a single unified public library service was initiated, which was directed and later financed by the Province.[46] This form of regional unit is known as the state or provincial pattern. The states of Hawaii and New Mexico quite recently adopted this type of service pattern: Hawaii, because it is quite compact in its land area, and New Mexico, because of its small population base which is concentrated in a few areas of the state.

The fourth type of larger unit pattern identified by Merrill is the state regional service center, whereby coordination and supplemental service are provided through regional service centers. Vermont pioneered in the development of this form of organization in the early 1930's, again due to the largess of the Carnegie Corporation. In

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[45]Nora Bateson, The Carnegie Library Demonstration in Prince Edward Island, Canada, 1933-1936 (Prince Edward Island Libraries, 1936).

[46]Helen M. Harris, "The Regional Library," in Library Extension: Problems and Solutions, edited by Carleton B. Joeckel (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1946), p. 88.

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1937, four regional centers were designated for the purpose of serving contiguous areas of the state. County lines were not followed in delineating these areas, but a typical region included three counties.[47]

A similar pattern was followed by several other states, only a few of which will be mentioned here. Massachusetts developed regional libraries of this type in 1940,[48] while New Hampshire followed suit in 1963.[49]

The federal-state-county pattern, represented by the regional libraries organized in cooperation with the Tennessee Valley Authority (1937-1941), constitutes still another type of larger unit planning for library service.[50] Two regional libraries were developed under TVA auspices and with the participation of local libraries and governments. From Huntsville, Alabama, a Northeast Alabama Regional Service has extended service to residents of an area of over 2,500 square miles.[51] Similarly, library

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[47]Dorothy Randolph, "Vermont's Regional Library Centers," in Regional Library Case Studies (Chicago: American Library Association, 1941), pp. 5-10.

[48]H. M. Beal et al., The Regional Library Experiment in Massachusetts (Boston: Department of Education 1944).

[49]Mildred P. McKay, "New Hampshire's Single State Library System," in "Regional Public Library Systems," edited by H. Smith, Library Trends, XIII (January, 1965), 279-286.

[50]See Mary U. Rothrock and Helen M. Harris, "A Regional Library in the Tennessee Valley," in Regional Library Case Studies (Chicago: American Library Association, 1941), pp. 11-17.

[51]Merrill, op. cit., p. 7.

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service was extended by the Hiwassee Regional Library located in Murphy, North Carolina, over a very large area.[52]

No claim is made that this classification of various large unit patterns represents an evolution, much less a progression to an optimal pattern. The only purpose in presenting this brief sketch of types of regional library development is to indicate that the decade spanned by the 1930's was a period of innovative change, characterized by new thinking and demonstrations of that thinking with respect to the development of new bases for library service.[53]

It is difficult to isolate with any accuracy all of the significant factors which seemed to converge so fortuitously in stimulating regional library organization. Some of the more prominent ones have already been discussed. The failure of the single county unit to measure up to expectations was certainly a major influence, as was the munificence of the Carnegie Corporation.[54] In addition, the role of the federal government cannot be overlooked.

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[52] Ibid., p. 8.

[53] According to Helen Harris, prior to 1937 there were six regional libraries in the United States and Canada; between 1937 and 1944, fourteen additional units had been established in eight southern states (Harris, op. cit., pp. 88-89).

[54] For a brief summary of Carnegie contributions to library service, see Florence Anderson, Carnegie Corporation Library Programs 1911-1961 (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1963).

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Both the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Works Projects Administration were a source of funds for many attempts at library extension and demonstration.[55]

Although it is true that the temper of the times, previous history and experience, in addition to the factors already cited, significantly influenced, if not "caused," the emergence of the regional library, in the last analysis the most essential ingredient in this or any other enterprise is leadership. And leadership of high quality was not lacking in the library profession at this time. In 1935, Carleton Bruns Joeckel published his seminal critique of public library organization, The Government of the American Public Library,[56] in which he analyzed both the strengths and weaknesses of patterns of service up to that time, and at the same time set forth his platform for future regional library development. Because the prevailing organizational pattern, Joeckel argued, could not provide the country with adequate service outside of large cities, he proposed a new plan. Briefly, this plan centered on the idea of regional, rather than municipal, library service supported in part by the state, and based on the consolidation or federation of existing units within a natural

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[55]For a discussion of the influence of the Works Projects Administration, see Edward B. Stanford, Library Extension under the W.P.A. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1944), pp. 33-37.

[56]Joeckel, The Government of the American Public Library. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1935).

region, without respect to local political boundaries.[57]

While it is obvious that the main thrust of Joeckel's arguments were directed toward new units of service, it is interesting to note the significant role given the idea of strong centralized service points.

> A [regional] library cannot support an adequate claim to efficiency until it has a strong, well-selected, and up-to-date reference collection . . . and a strong and well-selected central reservoir of circulating books . . . on which readers may draw at will. . . . [Such] an integrated unit [would also] include . . . a staff of specialists sufficient to provide a high quality of general and technical reference service, readers' advisory service, service to adult groups, and service to children and schools.[58]

The library profession as a whole was not quite ready at that time to capitalize on this idea. With limited resources in personnel as well as finance--how could serious attention be given to providing higher levels of service, when so many thousands had no service at all? So seemed the thought of many librarians. The extension of service horizontally, albeit thinly, over the United States was the first priority; vertical or in-depth service was a more or less remote concern outside of urban public libraries. Furthermore the function of the central headquarters library in regional systems did not seem to move beyond the "county-headquarters" stage.[59] Service remained

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[57] Ibid., pp. 351-355.

[58] Ibid., pp. 316-317.

[59] Helen Harris confirms this observation: "Regional library service in actual day-to-day operation closely resembles county library service. Headquarters are

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decentralized and fragmented while administrative and technical processes were often centralized. Thus the first generation of regional libraries substantially shifted the focus of library planning away from the single county as the only larger unit of service, but it did not bring about a refinement or qualitative upgrading of service.

Second Generation Regional Libraries

During the Second World War, regional library service was being adopted in several areas, notably in Southern states. But progress was slow inasmuch as it often was a function of the federal government, whose primary concern at that time was prosecuting a war. Consequently, the next major advance in library service could not be expected until after the War. With this thought in mind, therefore, the American Library Association established a Committee on Post-War Planning, chaired by Carleton B. Joeckel. The major contribution of this committee occurred in 1943, with the publication of Post-War Standards for Public Libraries. This document focuses on three basic elements, all of which were deemed necessary for a productive program of library development: complete library coverage, library service of adequate quantity and dynamic quality, and large units and cooperation in library

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maintained at some central location; books are distributed through branch libraries, deposit collections, schools, and bookmobiles" (Library Extension: Problems and Solutions, p. 88).

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service.[60]

While these standards, on the one hand, represented a definite improvement over those adopted in 1933, they were also innovative insofar as quality service became a standard. Finally, the pendulum was beginning to swing back from the emphasis on access and the store-at-your-door concept of decentralized service to a concept of quality service based on a realistic appraisal of the needs of citizens in the Post-War era.

Lowell Martin commented on this earlier conception:

> Students come to the school for their education; it is not brought out to them. The schoolman said he wanted to improve quality of education and for this purpose he brings his clientele into a well equipped center; the librarian also said he wanted to improve service and for this purpose he brought facilities out to the people. Evidently the two had different conceptions of improved service; the schoolman meant range and depth of program; the librarian meant convenience of facilities.[61]

The Post-War Standards did serve to restate the notion of centralized strong points of service, the kind of hierarchical development first suggested by Joeckel in 1935. On this point it is interesting to note that the Standards concerning the size of public library units are an exact duplicate of those set forth by Joeckel in 1935.[62]

Although these standards did represent a significant

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[60]American Library Association, Committee on Post-War Planning, Post-War Standards for Public Libraries (Chicago: A.L.A., 1943), p. 15.

[61]Martin, op. cit., p. 148.

[62]Joeckel, op. cit., pp. 316-317.

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significant step forward, in some respects they are disappointing. True, the provision of quality service was stressed; however, the role of the central library and its implication for such service was not expanded upon. Concepts expounded eight years earlier seemed to hold a disproportionately large place in this document. In effect, they represented

> a compromise between the traditional concept of independent public libraries of all sizes as the pattern of library organization and support and the newer concept of library units large enough in resources to provide adequate modern service.[63]

Five years after the publication of the Public Library Standards, the Committee on Post-War Planning completed a National Plan for Public Library Service. This plan was characterized by Joeckel as "visionary because the sweeping changes it recommends in the American public library system are far in advance of present conditions in many states and local units."[64]

The National Plan did seem to suggest a more unqualified adherence to the earlier Joeckel thesis favoring the organization of public libraries by regions large enough to provide effective service.[65] But from a retrospective view, it seemed for the most part only as

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[63]Leigh, op. cit., p. 5.

[64]American Library Association, Committee on Post-War Planning, A National Plan for Public Library Service (Chicago: A.L.A., 1948), p. vii.

[65]Leigh, op. cit., p. 5.

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"visionary" as the earlier Post-War Standards. In fact the stated purpose of the plan was the implementation on a national level of the earlier Standards. Consequently, the formation of regional libraries, each encompassing a "natural" or trade area, was proposed, which would "greatly reduce the number of separate library authorities"[66] and lead "toward informal but systematic coordination of existing library resources and services."[67]

Unlike earlier documents and statements, however, the National Plan set forth clearly the need for strong points of service and the role of the central library within the larger unit.[68]

> Given an organization of library service based on the large unit, with an income meeting recommended standards, the service available to all people the country over will begin to approach the excellent service now available only to favored communities. The central library of the large unit will approximate in resources and types of service the good city library of the present time. A radiating system of branches, well supplied with materials for reading and study, staffed by skilled librarians, will act as community centers throughout the area.[69]

The National Plan was not quite completed when the Carnegie Corporation funded a detailed inquiry into the

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[66]A.L.A. Committee on Post-War Planning, A National Plan for Public Library Service, p. 36.

[67]Ibid., p. 84.

[68]With regard to the size of this unit, see Lowell Martin, "The Optimum Size of the Public Library Unit," in Library Extension: Problems and Solutions, edited by Carleton B. Joeckel (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1946), pp. 32-46.

[69]A.L.A. Committee on Post-War Planning, A National Plan for Public Library Service, pp. 35-36.

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public library.[70] The Public Library Inquiry extended over a period of almost three years. Insofar as it focused the attention of a large number of social scientists on the library, it thereby provided an objective and detached view of this agency. The results of the efforts of this study group constituted a penetrating diagnosis of both the weaknesses and strengths of the public library. The conclusions drawn by the Inquiry, however, did not strike out in any new direction. They served rather to reaffirm and thereby further establish the pattern of development outlined by Joeckel during the fifteen years preceding. According to Leigh, "There were differences in emphasis, and there were some substantive modifications, but there was nothing that suggested any radically different concepts of public library development."[71]

In view of the documentation presented thus far, it can be stated that during the first half of this century there has been evident a slow but steady progress towards larger units of service. This has not been solely a development in concept alone, but also an actual, empirical development. But what of the central library in this picture? In contrast to larger unit development, there has clearly been a lag in both the conceptual and the actual

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[70]For a summary, see Robert D. Leigh, The Public Library in the United States (New York: Columbia University, 1950).

[71]Leigh, "Changing Concepts of the Public Library's Role," p. 6.

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development of central libraries as strong points for direct service to readers. Joeckel, of course, seemed to appreciate the function of such units, and to an extent recognized their potential role. However, neither his innovative Government of the American Public Library nor the subsequent National Plan completely delineated the concept of the central library or seriously pressed for its implementation. The priorities of both documents centered chiefly on the larger unit and access to library service, not on the apparently less crucial provision of service intended to be a cut above that provided by local units.

Many state plans, however, and even some fairly recent ones continue to fail to acknowledge the role of the central library in the larger unit. New York State, for example, in 1949 proposed the establishment of larger units of service within which were located regional library service centers. Such centers would provide service "directly to local public libraries and librarians, not to the general public, just as a wholesaler supplies the wants of the retailer."[72] Of greater significance, however, is the fact that the standards proposed by the New York plan were fully in line with the definitions of minimum adequacy suggested by the National Plan and the Public

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[72]Charles M. Armstrong et al., Development of Library Services in New York State (Albany: State Education Department, 1949), p. 80. It was not until 1957 that the concept of a central library giving direct service to readers was incorporated into New York State library planning.

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Library Inquiry.[73]

But even so, the Watertown regional library, established in upstate New York in 1948 as an experiment in regional service advocated by the State Plan,[74] fell for a time into the trap that had caught many a larger unit before it, namely, trying to build without a strong central subject collection.[75]

Two other important documents appeared in the early 1950's--each significant for precisely opposite reasons. In 1953 public library standards for the State of California were published. These standards, which in almost every essential foreshadowed the concepts underlying the national standards published three years later, embodied without compromise the idea of adequate, modern library service based on the idea of strong centralized resources. According to these standards,

> The central or headquarters building for a public library system should be planned to house a comprehensive core collection of reference, reading, and other materials for direct public services, and to serve as a reservoir to supplement the materials in library units and service points affiliated with the system.[76]

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[73]Leigh, "Changing Concepts of the Public Library's Role," p. 7.

[74]Armstrong et al., op. cit., pp. 78 ff, 95-96.

[75]Martin, "County and Regional Libraries: Hope and Reality," p. 153.

[76]California Public Library Standards Workshop, "Proposed Public Library Service Standards for California," News Notes of the California Libraries, XLVIII, No. 3 (July, 1953), 376-384.

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The second document, perhaps, should not be called significant. It was certainly not significant in any developmental sense, and therefore is probably significant only in terms of this paper, insofar as it summarizes and argues in behalf of all of the old thinking which has so inhibited the growth of central libraries. The book in question is Gretchen Knief Schenk's County and Regional Library Development (Chicago: American Library Association, 1954). In a chapter titled "Modern Concepts of Service," the following argument is advanced for the continued decentralization of service:

> The far-reaching effect of decentralization of service points and centralization of administrative technical and routine services in well-supported, good quality libraries was revealed in a table of comparative library service in the State of Washington between 1940 and 1949 inclusive. Briefly, in 1940, before the passage of an adequate county and regional library law, there were 122 separate library units in the state with a total of an even two hundred distribution points. . . .
>
> At the close of the ten-year period, the number of separate administrative library units had been reduced to 101. The number of [local] service points . . . had risen . . . to two thousand, an exact ten-fold increase.[77]

Perhaps it is unnecessary to add that the concept of a central library offering direct service to readers does not get much space in this book. It is important then in the sense that it is somewhat indicative of how deep-seated was the commitment of librarians to reach out at

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[77]Gretchen Knief Schenk, County and Regional Library Development (Chicago: American Library Association, 1954), p. 7 (emphasis added).

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the local level, and extend at least a semblance of service to everyone. Moreover, it was the one-sided commitment to the principle of access that partially prevented attention from being paid to the other side of the coin: quality service and subject depth of resources. The groundwork for correcting this unbalanced development, however, was to be laid just a few years later in 1956, with the passage of the Library Services Act and the approval of new standards for public libraries.

Library Systems and the Central Library

The role of the Library Services Act in central library development was an indirect one. This law, as adopted by Congress, was specifically designed "to promote the further extension by the several States of public library services to rural areas without such services or with inadequate services."[78] Because of its rural emphasis, many states immediately began purchasing bookmobiles as proven devices for extending service. In addition, county libraries were "recharged" and multi-county units were encouraged--all for the purpose of trying to reach those without or with minimal library service.

However, two more or less indirect benefits were to be derived from L.S.A. funds which were quite instrumental in the evolution of a new concept of service. The first of these derives from the fact that several states

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[78]Public Law 597, Section 2.(a).

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pumped some of their share of funds into demonstrations of what library service could be. Many of these were not very innovative, but a few seemed to be genuine experiments in interlibrary cooperation. The significance of these demonstrations lies not so much in their success or failure, but in the fact that new patterns of service were beginning to emerge.

A second and indirect benefit was the stimulus from federal funds towards statewide planning.[79] The Act required a state plan for the expenditure of funds, and provided federal funds to pay for a share of the planning. Some states, of course, had already formulated plans long before the advent of federal funds, and many of these early plans met L.S.A. requirements. Other states did not have plans to submit, or if they did, they developed new ones instead. New York was in this latter category. And out of this new planning came a strong rationale for markedly superior service and central libraries.

Almost simultaneously with the passage of the Library Services Act came promulgation of new standards

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[79]For a further discussion of state plans initiated under the auspices of L.S.A., see Charles A. Bunge, "Statewide Library Surveys and Plans: Development of the Concept and Some Recent Patterns," Library Quarterly, XXXVI (January, 1966), 25-37. For earlier treatments of state planning, see Helen A. Ridgway, "State Plans and Surveys of Public Library Service," ALA Bulletin, XLIV (December, 1950), 463-468; and Charles A. Bunge, "Statewide Library Surveys and Plans, 1944-64," ALA Bulletin, LIX (May, 1965), 364-374.

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for public libraries. These standards constituted an official endorsement of a new approach to library organization and service insofar as they were specifically designed for "systems of library service."[80]

There had always been two goals for organizing larger units of service: increased quality and increased accessibility. These are in no way mutually exclusive, but an overemphasis on one could stunt the growth of the other. In fact, as was pointed out earlier, there was an obvious overemphasis on the access principle to the detriment of quality service.[81]

The 1956 Standards attempted to restore some balance between these goals. In an explanatory chapter on the concept of library systems, this document states that "the development of systems of libraries does not weaken or eliminate the small community library. On the contrary, it offers that library and its users greatly expanded resources and services."[82]

These Standards therefore attempted to meet both requirements of local access and superior service. In fact, the first three standards will illustrate this

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[80]American Library Association, Public Libraries Division, Public Library Service (Chicago: A.L.A., 1956), p. 9.

[81]Nelson Associates, "Evaluation of Public Library Systems" (unpublished draft) (Chicago: American Library Association, 1967), Chap. 2, p. 12.

[82]A.L.A. Public Libraries Division, Public Library Service, p. 7.

balance:

> Public library service should be universally available.
>
> There should be a community library easily accessible to every reader, and it should connect him with the total resources of his region and state.
>
> A central library or regional center open to every resident of a natural region should make available the essential resources and personnel of modern service.[83]

In fine, the public library standards did attempt to question somewhat or at least bring into perspective the role of the local service outlet by emphasizing the need for incorporating local units into systems which were based on strong central libraries. The Library Services Act, on the other hand, with its emphasis on providing service to unserved rural areas through local outlets, seemed to be pulling if not in an opposite direction, certainly in a different one. While L.S.A. was advocating convenience and local access, the standards were promoting less convenience but access to strong centralized units of service. This tension did not long go unnoticed, however. At a conference held in 1961 to evaluate progress made specifically under the Library Services Act, a serious question was raised concerning the predominant use of L.S.A. funds for extension services as opposed to the qualitative upgrading of services.

> To what extent has L.S.A. been more of the same, ending up in clearly substandard facilities? . . .
>
> When there are people without library resources, we know from standards that we ideally would like to provide two levels of facility--the strong central

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[83] Ibid., pp. 13-15.

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> library with collection and staff in depth, and branches or bookmobiles to bring some part of library resources close to people. In real life, because of limited funds, we must often choose between the two.
>
> The evidence shows that under L.S.A. the prevailing choice has been the provision of a small part of library service in a nearby location. This is what library extension has meant for 50 years. Fragmentation and convenience. Before roads and automobiles they were achieved in the village library. Now they are achieved with the bookmobile.84

With regard to larger units or systems of service superimposed on the traditional concept of county library service, Martin explains:

> Adding rooms to the house will improve it only if the foundation is strong. Whenever I hear of a multicounty library--which is a library like any other library except that it has the added load of distance and a more complicated governmental structure--I ask first to see the central unit, the foundation, the core of strength. Does it have a subject collection with depth, does it have a staff of professionals specialized in the several major aspects of library service? Or is it just a larger substandard library?85

These comments, perhaps more than any others, provide considerable insight into what appeared to be a profession-wide shift in thinking, a disenchantment with old programs, and at the same time, some notion of what was to come.

In some of the statewide planning generated by the L.S.A., a much heavier emphasis began to appear on providing access to library services of a substantially higher

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[84]Lowell A. Martin, "LSA and Library Standards: Two Sides of the Coin," in The Impact of the Library Services Act: Progress and Potential, edited by Donald A. Strout (Allerton Park Institute, Number 8) (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1962), pp. 6-7.

[85]Ibid., p. 10.

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quality. Nor was this phenomenon due solely to federal funding. Russia's Sputnik produced a major shift in the educational patterns of the United States. And the subsequent shifts in educational philosophy, coupled with the greatly increased number of students who were the result of the baby boom in the middle 1940's, and the generally increased educational level of the population--all of these changes combined to exert new demands on libraries of all types. These demands, however, were not for "more of the same," but were based on needs for resources of breadth and depth, for improved services of definite quality.

Among those states which moved quite early in the direction of library systems based on strong centralized services, two which depict the new pattern quite well are New York and Pennsylvania.

New York was a leader in regional library experimentation in the late 1940's. In fact a statewide study of library service was begun in 1945 and published in 1949. This study recommended that the State be divided into fifteen regions based on population and county size, but prior to this wholesale development, it was recommended that an experimental unit be established at Watertown.[86]

As was reported earlier, however, the concept of a

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[86]Armstrong et al., op. cit., pp. 71-96. For a detailed description of the Watertown experiment, see Charles M. Armstrong, "The New York State Experiment in Regional Library Service," Library Quarterly, XXI, No. 2 (April, 1951), 79-93.

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strong central library providing direct service to readers was not fully realized at that time, with the result that the 1949 Plan makes no provision for such central units.

In the summer of 1956 a new statewide plan for library development was initiated, one which was certain not to repeat the weaknesses of its predecessor. Not only did this plan provide for wide variation in system configuration, it also described and then underscored the role of the central library in the system.

> The core of all systemwide services will be the central library. From it, field consultant staff and bookmobiles will emanate to serve the libraries and people in the system's service area. To it, readers will come for special reference services and involved information searches. In it will be housed the largest book collection, the reservoir. . . .[87]

A similar pattern was applied to Pennsylvania through a study made in 1958. Although this statewide plan does not offer the range in systems organization afforded by the New York Plan, it does rely heavily on the central library concept. According to this plan, the state was divided into 27 special library districts, with each district having as a service hub a district library center.[88]

> The twenty-seven "district library centers" would be located strategically across the State so that no person would have to travel more than one hour . . . to reach one of these strong points. Here would be a

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[87]Commissioner of Education's Committee on Public Library Service, Report (Albany: State Education Department, 1958), p. 29.

[88]Lowell A. Martin et al., Library Service in Pennsylvania: Present and Proposed, Vol. I (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania State Library, 1958), p. 86.

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> collection of 75,000 volumes or more; . . . here would be a professional staff. . . .[89]
>
> Essentially what would happen would be that such libraries would extend their service areas for free circulation and reference use beyond city boundaries, closing the gaps of availability of such high-level service that now exist.[90]

Clearly, the concept of library service posited by these plans represents a new direction, a new philosophy. For over half a century the form of library organization limited the development of its function, which is service. Earlier patterns of service tended to be only as good as the conception on which they were founded. If a library starts out to be a convenient source of popular reading, it will be supported as such, but not at a higher level. If it conceives of itself as a modern library able to serve readers with specialized resources and services, on the other hand, it thereby increases the probability that it will rise to this level.[91]

Most of the earlier efforts generated by the larger unit of service concept, and indeed, much of the effort under L.S.A., were directed toward making books physically convenient for people, books which perhaps were read because they were convenient. Only in the last few years, due to the impetus of some forward-looking statewide planning, and due to the passage of the Library Services and

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[89] Ibid., I, 86-87. [90] Ibid., I, 95.

[91] Lowell A. Martin, "Library Interdependence and Joint Action," Missouri Library Association Quarterly, XXI (March, 1960), 27.

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Construction Act in 1964, has effort been seriously focused on building strong resources and service programs, so that those needing superior collections and quality service will have access to them by means of reasonable effort.[92] This Act, moreover, was not oriented solely to the rural population, and as its name implies, funds were provided for the construction of library buildings of all types. Of major importance was the inclusion of the urban library, the type of library which so often was designated as the service center for a region.

The 1966 Minimum Standards for Public Library Systems[93] also reflects this new rethinking, with unqualified emphasis on library systems and central library resources as the key to the system. Thus, while the 1956 standards[94] called for a minimum collection of 100,000 volumes in the entire system, the 1966 standards[95] prescribed the same number of adult, nonfiction titles just for the system's headquarters.

The importance which is now being assigned to the

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[92]Lowell A. Martin, "Library Development Under the Library Services Act and the Library Services and Construction Act" (an informal report to the U.S. Commissioner of Education, mimeographed, 1966), p. 3.

[93]American Library Association, Public Library Association, Minimum Standards for Public Library Systems (Chicago: A.L.A., 1967).

[94]A.L.A. Public Libraries Division, Public Library Service, p. 36.

[95]A.L.A. Public Library Association, Minimum Standards for Public Library Systems, p. 42.

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central library as an agency designed to provide directly a higher level of service to readers is further attested to by the move in some areas to emphasize this direct service role over other responsibilities. Some library systems, for example, have established in addition to a central library a separate system headquarters--- a library's library--- to provide extension and consulting services to local libraries. Other states have proposed a still higher level of service (research level) to meet the needs of specialized audiences.

All of these developments are based on the concept of larger units of service. The purpose of this paper was to trace the application of this model in various statewide plans. What remains to be done is to test through research the several assumptions underlying it with a view to modifying it (if necessary) to meet new and emerging user needs.

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